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UNCLAS ROME 001274

SIPDIS

FOR IIP, EUR/PPD, EUR/WE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAO OIIP IT](#)

SUBJECT: INFLUENCE ANALYSIS: ITALY

REF: STATE 33359

INTRODUCTION: INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

1. Italy has the kind of wide-open media environment characteristic of most modern democracies. As in other countries, most Italians get their news and information from television news programs. There are seven main broadcast evening news programs, with two prime-time newscasts - one public (RAI) and one private (Channel 5 of Mediaset) enjoying the highest viewership (around 8 million and 7.4 million respectively). While there has been much criticism that Prime Minister Berlusconi potentially could control, directly or indirectly, six of seven broadcast channels (the Berlusconi family owns the three Mediaset channels and the GOI controls the board of the three public RAI stations), there is a lively debate of the issues on television and in other media, and certainly no lack of criticism of the Berlusconi government. The number of satellite TV consumers has grown greatly of late (reaching nearly one-quarter of Italian households), although the use of cable TV is nowhere near as prevalent as it is in the U.S.

2. A 2003 study shows that the Internet is increasingly becoming an important medium of information for Italians, but usage is still considerably less prevalent than in most Western European countries. The number of Italian families with personal computers is now over half (a 14% percent increase over 2002), and over one-third has Internet connections (a 19% increase from 2002). Young people between the ages of 14 and 30 in particular rely on the Internet, with nearly forty per cent indicating that they are "regular users." Recognizing the growing importance of e-mail and the web in communicating with our audience, the mission has put significantly greater resources into electronic outreach, creating a weekly "e-newsletter" and greatly expanding the number of Italian-language texts on our website, given the relatively low number of Italians with a good knowledge of English.

3. Newspapers have an influence on the political debate in this country that goes far beyond what is reflected in raw circulation figures (the two leading dailies, "Corriere della Sera," and "La Repubblica" have daily circulations of around 650,000). Politicians use the newspapers (and certain public affairs TV programs) to promote their points of view, float new initiatives, and in general try to affect the nation's political agenda. With only two or three that could be termed "centrist," national newspapers tend to reflect the full spectrum of political orientations reflected in parliament, and are closely followed by opinion-makers. Regional newspapers in Italy's many medium-sized cities also play a significant role in shaping public opinion. In spite of newspapers' very active and persuasive reach, many observers believe that Italian readers tend to judge much reporting as less than completely reliable. This is because with only a few exceptions ("Corriere della Sera," "La Stampa," and "Il Sole-24 Ore"), Italy's national (and many regional) newspapers line up according to political affiliation and other interests. Many have also noted that journalistic reporting standards, particularly at the regional level, do not always reach highest professional levels.

4. If we want our voice to be heard on issues of importance to us, such as Iraq and the war against terrorism, we need to get our message across on the newspapers' op-ed and foreign news pages. Fortunately, newspaper editors have been generally very open to publishing articles by both Ambassador Sembler (in 2003, he had over twenty op-eds published in national newspapers), other USG officials and private experts facilitated by Public Affairs (dozens in various national and regional papers.)

5. Other prominent participants in the public debate on social and political issues include the Catholic Church, labor unions, and anti-globalization activists. Pope John Paul II's pronouncements against military action in Iraq played a key role in shaping the debate on the Italian role in the conflict, and the Vatican's stand on

certain social issues frequently influences domestic policy considerations. Labor union and anti-globalization movements frequently use the streets in their attempts to shape policy, and their demonstrations are closely covered and commented on by the media.

MPP THEMES/AUDIENCE TARGETS

THEME ONE: COUNTERTERRORISM

16. Bilateral cooperative efforts in this area have been outstanding. Italy has been an active participant in the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan, and U.S. and Italian law enforcement agencies have worked together to freeze terrorist assets and disrupt terrorist cells. Although officially a member of the "coalition of the willing," Italian public support for military action in Iraq was weak. In addition, polls show that a significant minority would support a withdrawal from Iraq. We focused our PD efforts in this area on maintaining Italian resolve for a robust response to terrorism, and support for staying the course in Iraq. To reach center-left skeptics, we have placed over a dozen Ambassadorial op-eds and many USG byliners in centrist and center-left newspapers ("Corriere della Sera," "La Stampa," "La Repubblica," "Il Messaggero," "Il Riformista," "Secolo XIX," and "Il Gazzettino"). We have arranged DVCs and speaker programs with important think tanks and academic institutions throughout the country. We have used the IV and Vol Vis programs to send numerous journalists, jurists, law enforcement and other public officials to the U.S. to learn more about our efforts to fight terrorism.

THEME TWO: HOMELAND SECURITY

17. Working with Consular, we have revamped our Visa pages to communicate new regulations to visa applicants. We have also arranged briefings for the media to allow them to publicize new Congressional requirements for machine-readable passports and biometrics. PA Milan has worked with the Consular Section there to set up programs in universities to explain new visa requirements and encourage students to apply early. We have placed a high priority on getting accurate information on the new Container Security Initiative, and have issued Customs press releases and arranged media opportunities for Ambassador Sembler in participating Italian ports. We have organized DVCs and Voluntary Visitor programs to provide detailed information to Italian contacts about new visa regulations, including machine-readable passports and biometrics.

THEME THREE: REGIONAL STABILITY

18. We use targeted exchange programs for journalists, such as IV and NATO tours, to improve understanding of the role of American forces in Italy and maintain a high level of public support for Italian military missions abroad, such as in the Balkans and Afghanistan. We take advantage of frequent visits by senior military and Pentagon officials to arrange press conferences and backgrounders, allowing them to explain U.S. security and defense policy. We have brought more than two dozen U.S. Speakers to Italy to participate in seminars, round-tables, and conferences on U.S. security and defense policies throughout the country.

THEME FOUR: ECONOMIC PROSPERITY AND SECURITY

19. Our biggest challenge in this area has been biotechnology, due to opposition from the public and politicians. We have focused many of our resources to get the word out about the safeguards and science of GMOs. To reach the public, we placed op-eds by senior officials and arranged media opportunities for USDA and State Department officials. We've used the IV program to send journalists to get a first-hand look at the system of safeguards in the United States. To help get the message directly to Italian farmers, Milan took a U.S. soybean farmer all over northern Italy to meet with hundreds of Italian farmers and numerous agricultural associations. We have organized seminars, round-tables, conferences on DVCs on such issues as biotechnology and intellectual property rights and have brought ten U.S. speakers to Italy to discuss economic prosperity and security issues with Italian audiences.

THEME FIVE: INTERNATIONAL CRIME AND DRUGS

10. U.S. and Italian law enforcement work closely together to combat the full range of international criminal activities. We put together a number of targeted exchange programs for Italian magistrates and other public officials who are involved in these issues and others such as trafficking in human beings and

victims rights. In Naples, we organized a day-long seminar involving Embassy and Italian counterterrorism/organized crime authorities. Another is

being planned. Our law enforcement colleagues tell us that these exchanges have greatly increased cooperation and information sharing. We have organized DVCs and Voluntary Visitor programs on drug issues and the issue of trafficking in human beings.

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2004ROME01274 - Classification: UNCLASSIFIED